PHILIP STEELE

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CHAPTER I.

The Hyacinth Letter.

PHILIP STEELE'S pencil drove steadily over the paper, as if the mere writing of a letter he might never mail in some way lessened the loneliness.

The wind is blowing a furious gale outside. From off the lake come volleys of sleet, like shot from guns, and all the wild demons of this black night in the wilderness seem bent on tearing apart the huge end-locked logs that form my cabin home. In truth, it is a terrible night to be afar from human companionship, with naught but this roaring desolation about and the air above filled with screeching terrors. Even through thick log walls I can hear the surf roaring among the rocks and beating the white driftwood like a thousand battering rams, almost at my door. It is a night to make one shiver, and in the lulls of the storm the tall pines above me whistle and wail mournfully as they straighten their twisted heads after the blasts.

To-morrow this will be a desolation of snow. There will be snow from here to Hudson's Bay, from the bay to the arctic, and where now there is all this fury and strife of wind and sleet there will be unending quiet—the stillness which breeds our tongueless people of the North. But this is small comfort for to-night. Yesterday I caught a little mouse in my flour and killed him. I am sorry now, for surely all this trouble and thunder in the night would have driven him out from his home in the wall to keep me company.

It would not be so bad if it were not for the skull. Three times in the last half hour I have started to take it down from its shelf over my crude stone fireplace, where pine logs are blazing. But each time I have fallen back, shivering, into the bed-like chair I have made for myself out of saplings and caribou skin. It is a human skull. Only a short time ago it was a living man, with a voice, and eyes, and brain—and that is what makes me uncomfortable. If it were an old skull, it would be different. But it is a new skull. Almost I fancy at times that there is life lurking in the eyeless sockets, where the red firelight from the pitch-weighted logs plays in grewsome flashes; and I fancy, too, that in the brainless cavities of the skull there must still be some of the old passion, stirred into spirit life by the very madness of this night. A hundred times I have been sorry that I kept the thing, but never more so than now.

How the wind howls and the pines screech above me! A pailful of snow, plunging down my chimney, sends the chills up my spine as if it were the very devil himself, and the steam of it surges out and upward and hides the skull. It is absurd to go to bed, to make an effort to sleep, for I know what my dreams would be. To-night they would be filled with this skull—and with visions of a face, a woman's face—

Thus far had Steele written, when with a nervous laugh he sprang from his chair, and with something that sounded very near to an oath, in the wild tumult of the storm, crumpled the paper in his hand and flung it among the blazing logs he had described but a few moments before.

"Confound it, this will never do!" he exclaimed, falling into his own peculiar habit of communing with himself. "I say it won't do, Phil Steele; deuce take it if it will! You're getting nervous, what a beast of a night!"

He turned to the rude stone fireplace again as another blast of snow plunged down the chimney.

"Wish I'd built a fire in the stove instead of there," he went on, filling his pipe. "Thought it would be a little more cheerful, you know. Lord preserve us, listen to that!"

He began walking up and down the hewn log floor of the cabin, his hands deep in his pockets, puffing out voluminous clouds of smoke. It was not often that Philip Steele's face was unpleasant to look upon, but to-night it wore anything but its natural good humor. It was a strong, thin face, set off by a square jaw, and with clear, steel-gray eyes in which just now there shone a strange glitter, as they rested for a moment upon the white skull over he ire. From his scrutiny of the skull Steele turned to a rough board table, lighted by a twisted bit of cotton cloth, three-quarters submerged in a shallow tin of caribou grease. In the dim light of this improvised lamp there were two letters, opened and soiled, which an Indian had brought up to him from Nelson House the day before. One of them was short and to the point. It was an official note from headquarters ordering him to join a certain Buck Nome at Lac Bain, a hundred miles farther north.

It was the second letter which Steele took in his hands for the twentieth time since it had come to him here, 300 miles into the wilderness. There were half a dozen pages of it, written in a woman's hand, and from it there rose to his nostrils the faint, sweet perfume of hyacinth. It was this odor that troubled him—that had troubled him since yesterday, and that made him restless and almost homesick to-night. It took him back to things—to the days of not so very long ago when he had been a part of the life from which the letter came, and when the world had seemed to hold for him all that one could wish. In a retrospective flash there passed before him a vision of those days, when he, Mr. Philip Steele, son of a multimillionaire banker, was one of the favored few in the social life of a great city; when fashionable clubs opened their doors to him, and beautiful women smiled upon him, and when, among others, this girl of the hyacinth letter held out to him the tempting lure of her heart. Her heart? Or was it the tempting of his own wealth? Steele laughed, and his strong white teeth gleamed in a half-contemptuous smile as he turned again toward the fire.

He sat down, with the letter still in his hands, and thought of some of those others whom he had known. What had become of Jack Moody, he wondered—the good old Jack of his college days, who had loved this girl of the hyacinth with the whole of his big, honest heart, but who hadn't been given half a show because of his poverty? And where was Whittemore, the young broker whose hopes had fallen with his own financial ruin; and Fordney, who would have cut off ten years of his life for her—and half a dozen others he might name?

Her heart! Steele laughed softly as he lifted the letter so that the sweet perfume of it came to him more strongly. How she had tempted him for a time! Almost—that night of the Hawkins' ball—he had surrendered to her. He half closed his eyes, and as the logs crackled in the fireplace and the wind roared outside, he saw her again as he had seen her that night—gloriously beautiful; memory of the witchery of her voice, her hair, her eyes firing his blood like strong wine. And this beauty might have been for him, was still his, if he chose. A word from out of the wilderness, a few lines that he might write to-night—

With a sudden jerk Steele sat bolt upright. One after another he crumpled the sheets of paper in his hand and tossed all but the signature page into the fire. The last sheet he kept, studied it for a little—as if her name were the answer to a problem—then laid it aside. For a few moments there remained still the haunting sweetness of the hyacinth. When it was gone, he gave a last searching sniff, rose to his feet with a laugh in which there was some return of his old spirit, hid that final page of her letter in his traveling kit and proceeded to refill his pipe.

More than once Philip Steele had told himself that he was born a century or two after his time. He had admitted this much to a few of his friends, and they had laughed at him. One evening he had opened his heart a little to the girl of the hyacinth letter, and after that she had called him eccentric. Within himself he knew that he was unlike other men, that the blood in him was calling back to almost forgotten generations, when strong hearts and steady hands counted for manhood rather than stocks and bonds, and when romance and adventure were not quite dead. At college he took civil engineering, because it seemed to him to breathe the spirit of outdoors; and when he had finished he incurred the wrath of those at home by burying himself for a whole year with a surveying expedition in Central America.

It was this expedition that put the finishing touch to Philip Steele. He came back a big hearted, clear minded young fellow, as bronzed as an Aztec—a hater of cities and the hothouse varieties of pleasure to which he had been born, and as far removed from anticipation of his father's millions as though they had never been. He possessed a fortune in his own right, but as yet he had found no use for the income that was piling up. A second expedition, this time to Brazil, and then he came back—to meet the girl of the hyacinth letter. And after that, after he had broken from the bondage which held Moody, and Fordney, and Whittemore, he went back to his many adventures.

It was the North that held him. In the unending desolations of snow and forest and plain, between Hudson's Bay and the wild country of the Athabasca, he found the few people and the mystery and romance which carried him back, and linked him to the dust-covered generations he had lost. One day a slender, athletically built young man enlisted at Regina for service in the Northwest Mounted Police. Within six months he had made several records for himself, and succeeded in having himself detailed to service in the extreme North, where man-hunting became the thrilling game of One against One in an empty and voiceless world. And no one, not even the girl of the hyacinth letter, would have dreamed that the man who was officially listed as "Private Phil Steele, of the N. W. M. P.," was Philip Steele, millionaire and gentleman adventurer.

None appreciated the humor of this fact more than Steele himself, and he fell again into his wholesome laugh as he placed a fresh pine log on the fire, wondering what his aristocratic friends—and especially the girl of the hyacinth letter—would say if they could see him and his environment just at the present moment. In a slow, chuckling survey he took in the heavy German socks which he had hung to dry close to the fire; his worn shoe-packs, shining in a thick coat of caribou grease, and his single suit of steaming underwear that he had washed after supper, and which hung suspended from the ceiling, looking for all the world, in the half dusk of the cabin, like a very thin and headless man. In this gloom, indeed, but one thing shone out white and distinct—the skull on the little shelf above the fire. As his eyes rested on it, Steele's lips tightened and his face grew dark. With a sudden movement he reached up and took it in his hands, holding it for a moment so that the light from the fire flashed full upon it. In the left side, on a line with the eyeless socket and above the ear, was a hole as large as a small egg.

"So I'm ordered up to join Nome, the man who did this, eh?" he muttered, fingering the ragged edge. "I could kill him for what happened down there at Nelson House, M'sieur Janette. Some day—I may."

He balanced the skull on his finger tips, level with his chin.

"Nice sort of a chap for a Hamlet, I am," he went on, whimsically. "I believe I'll chuck you into the fire, M'sieur Janette. You're getting on my nerves."

He stopped suddenly and lowered the skull to the table.

"No, I won't burn you," he continued. "I've brought you this far and I'll pack you up to Lac Bain with me. Some morning I'll give you to Bucky Nome for breakfast. And then, M'sieur—then we shall see what we shall see."

Later that night he wrote a few words on a slip of paper and tacked the paper to the inside of his door. To any who might follow in his footsteps it conveyed this information and advice:

NOTICE!

This cabin and what's in it are quasheed by me. Fill your gizzard but not your pockets.

STEELE, Northwest Mounted.

CHAPTER II.

A Face Out of the Night.

STEELE came up to the Hudson's Bay Company's post at Lac Bain on the seventh day after the big storm, and Breed, the factor, confided two important bits of information to him while he was thawing ou before the big box-stove in the company's deserted and supply-stripped store. The first was that a certain Col. Becker and his wife had left Fort Churchill, on Hudson's Bay, to make a visit at Lac Bain; the second, that Buck Nome had gone westward a week before and had not returned. Breed was worried, not over Nome's prolonged absence, but over the anticipated arrival of the other two. According to the letter which had come to him from the Churchill factor, Col. Becker and his wife had come over on the last supply ship from London, and the colonel was a high official in the company's service. Also, he was an old gentleman. Ostensibly he had no business at Lac Bain, but was merely on a vacation, and wished to see a bit of real life in the wilderness.

Breed's grizzled face was miserable.

"Why don't they send 'em down to York Factory or Nelson House?" he demanded of Steele. "They've got duck feathers, three women, and a civilized factor at the Nelson, and there ain't any of 'em here—not even a woman!"

Steele shrugged his shoulders as Breed mentioned the three women at Nelson.

"There are only two women there now," he replied. "Since a certain Bucky Nome passed that way, one of them has gone into the South."

"Well, two, then," said Breed, who had not caught the flash of fire in the other's eyes. "But I tell you there ain't a one here, Steele, not even an Indian—and that dirty Cree, Jack, is doing the cooking. Blessed Saints, I caught him mixing biscuit dough in the wash basin the other day, and I've been eating those biscuits ever since since our people went out to their traplines! There's you, and Nome, two Crees, a 'half,' and myself—and that's every soul there'll be at Lac Bain until the mid-winter run of fur! Now, what in heaven's name is the poor old Mrs. Colonel going to do?"

"Got a bed for her?"

"A bunk—hard as nails!"

"Good grub?"

"Rotten!" groaned the factor. "Every trapper's son of them took out big supplies this fall and we're stripped. Beans, flour, sugar'n' prunes—and caribou until I feel like turning inside out every time I smell it. I'd give a month's commission for a pound of pork. Look here! If this letter ain't 'quality' you can cut me into jiggers. Bet the Mrs. Colonel wrote it for her hubby."

From an inside pocket Breed drew forth a square white envelope with a broken steal of red wax, and from it extracted a folded sheet of cream-tinted paper. Scarcely had Steele taken the note in his hands when a quick thrill passed through him. Before he had read the first line he was conscious again of that haunting sweetness in the air he breathed—the perfume of hyacinth. There was not only this perfume, but the same paper, the same delicately pretty writing of the letter he had burned more than a week before. He made no effort to suppress the exclamation of astonishment that broke from his lips. Breed was staring at him when he lifted his eyes.

"This is a mighty strange coincidence, Breed," he said, regaining his composure. "I could almost swear that I know this writing, and yet of course such a thing is impossible. Still, it's mighty queer. Will you let me keep the letter until to-night? I'd like to take it over to the cabin and compare it——"

"Needn't return it at all," interrupted the factor. "Hope you find something interesting to tell me at supper—5 sharp. It will be a blessing if you know 'em."

Ten minutes later Steele was in the little cabin which he and Nome occupied while at Lac Bain. Jack, the Cree, had built a rousing fire in the long sheet-iron stove, and as Steele opened its furnace-like door, a flood of light poured out into the gathering gloom of early evening. Drawing a chair full into the light, he again opened the letter. Line for line and word for word he scrutinized the writing, and with each breath that he drew he found himself more deeply thrilled by a curious mental excitement which it was impossible for him to explain. According to the letter, Col. and Mrs. Becker had arrived at Churchill aboard the London ship a little over a month previously. He remembered that the date on the letter from the girl was six weeks old. At the time it was written, Col. Becker and his wife were either in London or Liverpool, or crossing the Atlantic. No matter how similar the two letters appeared to him, he realized that, under the circumstances, the same person could not have written them both. For many mintues he sat back in his chair, with his eyes half closed, absorbing the comforting heat of the fire. Again the old vision returned to him. In a subconscious sort of way he found himself fighting against it, as he had struggled a score of times to throw off its presence, since the girl's letter had come to him. And this time, as before, his effort was futile. He saw her again—and always as on that night of the Hawkins' ball, eyes and lips smiling at him, the light shining gloriously in te deep red gold of er hair.

With an effort Steele aroused himself and looked at his watch. It was a quarter of five. He stooped to close the stove door, and stopped suddenly, his hand reaching out, head and shoulders hunched over. Across his knee, shining in the firelight, like a thread of spun gold, lay a single filament of a woman's hair.

He rose slowly, holding the hair between him and the light. His fingers trembled, his breath came quickly. The hair had fallen upon his knee from the letter—or the envelope, and it was wonderfully like her hair!

From the direction of the factor's quarters came the deep bellowing of Breed's moose-horn, calling him to supper. Before he responded to it, Steele wound the silken thread of gold about his finger, then placed it carefully among the papers and cards which he carried in his leather wallet. His face was flushed when he joined the factor. Not since the night at the Hawkins' ball, when he had felt the touch of a beautiful woman's hands, the warmth of her breath, the soft sweep of her hair against his lips as he had leaned over her in his half-surrender, had thought of woman stirred him as he felt himself stirred now. He was glad that Breed was too much absorbed in his own troubles to observe any possible change in himself or to ask questions about the letter.

"I tell you, it may mean the short birch for me, Steele," said the factor gloomily. "Lac Bain is just now the emptiest, most fallen-to-pieces, unbusiness-like post between the Athabasca and the bay. We've had two bad seasons running, and everything has gone wrong. Col. Becker is a big one with the company. Ain't no doubt about that, and ten to one he'll think it's a new man that's wanted here."

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Steele. A sudden flash shot into his face as he looked hard at Breed. "See here, how would you like to have me go out to meet them?" he asked. "Sort of a welcoming committee of one, you know. Before they got here I could casually give 'em to understand what Lac Bain has been up against during the last two seasons."

Breed's face brightened in an instant.

"That might save us, Steele. Will you do it?"

"With pleasure."

Philip was conscious of an increasing warmth in his face as he bent over his plate. "You're sure—they're elderly people?" he asked.

"That is what MacVeigh wrote me from Churchill; at least he said the colonel was an old man."

"And his wife?"

"Has got her nerve," growled Breed irreverently. "It wouldn't be so bad if it was only the colonel. But an old woman—ugh! What he doesn't think of she'll remind him of, you can depend on that."

Steele thought of his mother, who looked at things through a magnifying lorgnette, and laughed a little cheerlessly.

"I'll go out and meet them, anyway," he comforted. "Have Jack fix me up for the hike in the morning, Breed. I'll start after breakfast."

He was glad when supper was over and he was back in his own cabin smoking his pipe. It was almost with a feeling of shame that he took the golden hair from his wallet and help it once more so that it shone before his eyes in the firelight.

"You're crazy, Phil Steele," he assured himself. "You're an unalloyed idiot. What the deuce has Col. Becker's wife got to do with you—even if she has golden hair and uses cream-tinted paper soaked in hyacinth? Confound it—there!" and he released the shining hair from his fingers so that the air currents sent it floating back into the deeper gloom of the cabin.

It was midnight before he went to bed. He was up with the first cold gray of dawn. All that day he strode steadily eastward on snowshoes, over the company's trail to the bay. Two hours before dusk he put up his light tent, gathered balsam for a bed, and built a fire of dry spruce against the face of a huge rock in front of his shelter. It was still light when he wrapped himself in his blanket and lay down on the balsam, with his feet stretched out to the reflected heat of the big rock. It seemed to Steele that there was an unnatural stillness in the air, as the night thickened beyond the rim of firelight, and, as the gloom grew still deeper, blotting out his vision in inky blackness, there crept over him slowly a feeling of loneliness. It was a new sensation to Steele, and he shivered as he sat up and faced the fire. It was this same quiet, this same unending mystery of voiceless desolation that had won him to the North. Until to-night he had loved it. But now there was something oppressive about it, something that made him strain his eyes to see beyond the rock and the fire, and set his ears in tense listening for sounds which did not exist. He knew that in this hour he was longing for companionship—not that of Breed, nor of men with whom he hunted men, but of men and women whom he had once known and in whose lives he had played a part—ages ago, it seemed to him. He knew, as he sat with clenched hands and staring eyes, that chiefly he was longing for a woman—a woman whose eyes and lips and sunny hair haunted him after months of forgetfulness, and whose face smiled at him luringly, now, from out the leaping flashes of fire—tempting him, calling him over a thousand miles of space. And if he yielded——

The thought sent his nails biting into the flesh of his palms and he sank back with a curse that held more of misery than blasphemy. Physical exhaustion rather than desire for sleep closed his eyes, at last, in half-slumber, and after that the face seemed nearer and more real to him, until it was close at his side, and 'was speaking to him. He heard again the soft, rippling laugh, girlishly sweet, that had fascinated him at Hawkins' ball; he heard the distant hum and chatter of other voices, and then one loud and close—that of Chesbro, who had unwittingly interrupted them, and saved him, just in the nick of time.

Steele moved restlessly; after a moment wriggled to his elbow and looked toward the fire. He seemed to hear Chesbro's voice again as he awoke, and a thrill as keen as an electric shock set his nerves tingling when he heard once more the laughing voice of his dream, hushed and low. In amazement he sat bolt upright and stared. Was he still dreaming? The fire was burning brightly and he was aware that he had scarce fallen into sleep.

A movement—a sound of feet crunching softl yin the snow, and a figure came between him and the fire.

It was a woman.

He choked back the cry that rose to his lips and sat motionless and without sound. The figure approached a step nearer, peering into the deep gloom of the tent. He caught the silver glint in the firelig on heavy fur, the whiteness of a hand touching lightly the flap of his tent, and then for an instant he saw a face. In the instant he sat as rigid as if he had stopped the beat of his own life. A pair of dark eyes laughing in at him, a flash of laughing teeth, a low titter that was scarce more than a rippling throat-note, and the face was gone, leaving him still staring into the blank space where it had been.

With a cough to give warning of his wakefulness, Steele flung off his blanket and drew himself through the low opening of the tent. On the extreme right of the fire stood a man and woman, warming themselves over the coals. They straightened from their leaning posture as he appeared.

"This is too bad, too bad, Mr. Steele," exclaimed the man, advancing quickly. "I was afraid we'd make a blunder and awaken you. We were about to camp on a mountain back there when we saw your fire and drove on to it. I'm sorry——"

"Wouldn't have had you miss me for anything," interrupted Steele, gripping the other's proffered hand. "You see, I'm out from Lac Bain to meet Colonel and Mrs. Becker, and——" He hesitated purposely, his white teeth gleaming in the frank smile which made people like him immensely, from the first.

"You've met them," completed the laughing voice from across the fire. "Please, Mr. Steele, will you forgive me for looking in at you and waking you up? But your feet looked so terribly funny, and I assure you that was all I could see, though I tried awfully hard. Anyway, I saw your name printed on the flap of your tent."

Steele felt a slow fire burning in his cheeks as he encountered the beautiful eyes glowing at him from behind the colonel. The woman was smiling at him. In the heat of the fire she had pushed back her fur turban, and he saw that her hair was the same shining red gold that had come to him in the letter, and that her lips and eyes and the glorious color in her face were remarkably like those of which he had dreamed, and of which waking vision had come with the hyacinth letter to fill him with unrest and homesickness. In spite of himself he had reasoned that she would be young and that she would have golden hair, but these other things, the laughing beauty of her face, the luring depth of her eyes.

He caught himself staring.

"I—I was dreaming," he almost stammered. He pulled himself together quickly. "I was dreaming of a face, Mrs. Becker. It seems strange that this should happen—away up here, in this way. The face that I dreamed of is a thousand miles from here, and it is wonderfully like yours."

The colonel was laughing at him when he turned. He was a little man, as straight as a gun rod, pale of face except for his nose, which was nipped red by the cold, and with a pointed beard as white as the snow under his feet. That part of his countenance which exposed itself above the top of his great fur coat and below his thick beaver cap was alive with good cheer, notwithstanding its pallor.

"Glad you're good humored about it, Steele," he cried with an immediate tone of comradeship. "We wouldn't have ventured into your camp if it hadn't been for Isobel. She was positively insistent, sir. Wanted to see who was here and what it looked like. Eh, Isobel, my dear, are you satisfied?"

"I surely didn't expect to find 'It' asleep at this time of the day," said Mrs. Becker. She laughed straight into Philip's face, and so roguishly sweet was the curve of her red lips and the light in her eyes that his heart quickened its beating, and the flush deepened in his cheeks.

"It's only six," he said, looking at his watch. "I don't usually turn in this early. I was tired to-night—though I am not, now," he added quickly. "I could sit up until morning—and talk. We don't often meet people from outside, you know. Where are the others?"

"Back there," said the colonel, waving an arm into the gloom. "Isobel made 'em sit down and be quiet, dogs and all, sir, while we came on alone. There are Indians, two sledges, and a ton of duff."

"Call them," said Steele. "There's room for your tent beside mine, colonel, close against the face of this rock. It's as good as a furnace."

The colonel moved a little out into the gloom and shouted to those behind. Philip turned to find Mrs. Becker looking at him in a timid, questioning sort of way, the laughter gone from her eyes. For a moment she seemed to be on the point of speaking to him, then picked up a short stick and began toying with the coals.

"You must be tired, Mrs. Becker," he said. "Now that you are near a fire, I would suggest that you throw off your heavy coat. You will be more comfortable, and I will bring you a blanket to sit on."

He dived into his tent and a moment later reappeared with a blanket, which he spread close against the butt of a big spruce within half a dozen feet of the fire. When he turned toward her, the colonel's wife had thrown off her coat and turbin and stood before him, a slim and girlish figure, bewitchingly pretty as she smiled her gratitude and nestled down into the place he had prepared for her. For a moment he bent over her, tucking the thick fur about her feet and knees, and in that moment he breathed from the heavy coils of her shining hair the flower-like sweetness which had already stirred him to the depths of his soul.

Colonel Becker was smiling down upon them when he straightened up, and at the humorous twinkle in his eyes, as he gazed from one to the other, Steele felt that the guilt of his own thoughts was blazing in his face. He was glad that the Indians came up with the sledges just at this moment, and as he went back to help them with the dogs and packs he swore softly at himself for the heat that was in his blood and the strange madness that was firing his brain. And inwardly he cursed himself still more when he returned to the fire. From out the deep gloom he saw the colonel sitting with his back against the spruce and Mrs. Becker nestling against him, her head resting upon his shoulder, talking and laughing up into his face. Even as he hesitated for an instant, scarce daring to break upon the scene, he saw her pull the gray-bearded face down to hers and kiss it, and in the ineffable contentment and happiness shining in the two faces in the firelight Philip Steele knew that he was looking upon that which had broken forever the haunting image of another woman in his heart. In its place would remain this picture of love—love as he had dreamed of it, as he had hoped for it, and which he had found at last—but not for himself—in the heart of a wilderness.

He saw now something childishly sweet and pure in the face that smiled welcome to him as he came noisily through the snow-crust; and something, too, in the colonel's face, which reached out and gripped at his very heart-strings, and filled him with a warm glow that was new and strange to him, and which was almost the happiness of these two. It swept from him the sense of loneliness which had oppressed him a short time before, and when at last, after they had talked for a long time beside the fire, the colonel's wife lifted her pretty head drowsily and asked if she might go to bed, he laughed in sheer joy at the pouting tenderness with which she rubbed her pink cheek against the grizzled face above her and at the gentle light in the colonel's eyes as he half carried her into the tent.

For a long time after he had rolled himself in his own blanket Philip lay awake, wondering at the strangeness of this thing that had happened to him. It was Her hair that he had seen shining this night under the old spruce, lustrous and soft, and coiled in its simple glory, as he had seen it last on the night when Chesbro had broken in on them at the ball. It was very easy for him to imagine that it had been Her face, with soul and heart and love he knew what had been missing for added to its beauty. More than ever he knew what had been missing for him now; he blessed Chesbro for his blundering, and fell asleep to dream of the new face, and to awaken hours later to the unpleasant realization that his visions were but dream-fabric after all, and that the woman was the wife of Col. Becker.

CHAPTER III.

A Skull and a Flirtation.

IT was late afternoon when they came into Lac Bain, and as soon as Philip had turned over the colonel and his wife to Breed, he hurried to his own cabin. At the door he encountered Buck Nome. The two men had not met since a month before at Nelson House, and there was but little cordiality in Steele's greeting as he went through the formality of shaking hands with his associate.

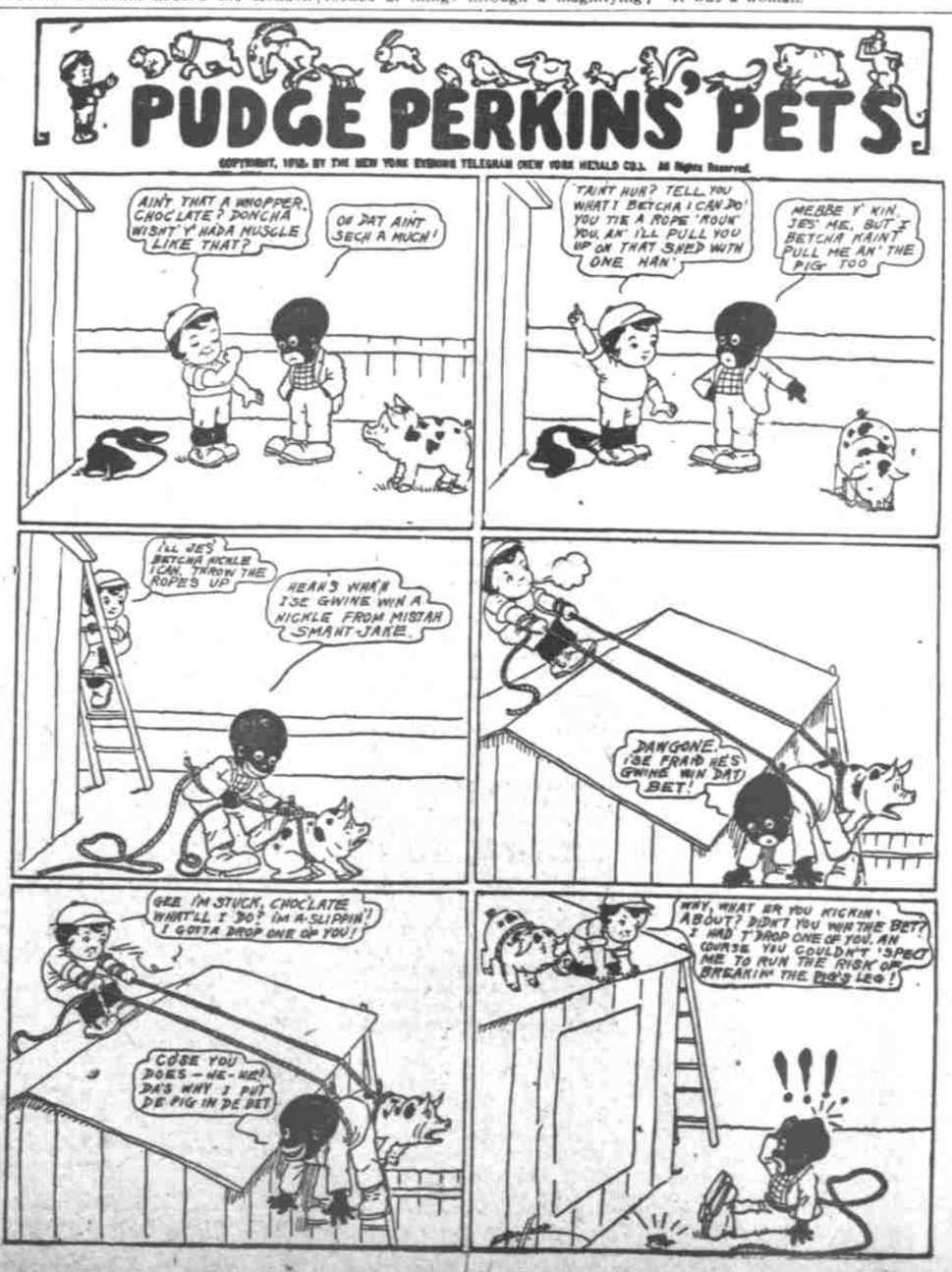
"I'm going to say howdy to 'em," explained Nome, pausing for a moment "Deuce of a good joke on you, Steele! How do you like the job of bringing in an old colonel's frozen wife, or a frozen colonel's old wife, eh?"

Every fiber in Steele's body grew tense at the banter in the other's voice. He whirled upon Nome, who had partly turned away. "You remember—you lied down there at Nelson to get just such a 'job' as this," he reminded. "Have you forgotten what happened—after that?"

"Don't get miffed about it, man," returned Nome with an irritating laugh. "All's fair in love and war. That was love down there, 'pon my word of honor it was, and this is about as near the other thing as I want to come."

There was something in his laugh that drew Steele's lips in a tight line as he entered the cabin. It was not the first time that he had listened to Nome's gloating chuckle at the mention of certain women. It was this more than anything else that made him hate the man. Physically, Nome was a magnificent specimen, beyond doubt the handsomest man in the service north of Winnipeg; so that while other men despised him for what they knew, women admired and loved him—until, now and then too late for their own salvation, they discovered that his moral code was rotten to the core. Such a thing had happened at Nelson House, and Philip felt himself burning with a desire to choke the life out of Nome as he recalled the tragedy there. And what would happen—now?" The thought came to him like a dash of cold water, and yet, after a moment, his teeth gleamed in a smile as a vision rose before him of the love and purity which he had seen in the sweet face of the colonel's wife. He chuckled softly to himself as he dragged out a pack from under his bunk; but there was no humor in the chuckle. From it he took a bundle wrapped in soft birch-bark, and from this produced the skull that he had brought up with him from the South. There was a tremble of excitement in his low laugh as he glanced about the gloomy interior of the cabin. From the log ceiling hung a big oil lamp with a tin reflector, and under this he hung the skull.

(TO BE CONTINUED NEXT SUNDAY.)



Antarctic Coal.

From the Philadelphia Press.

Capt. Scott's reported discovery of coal in the Antarctic regions is the most important practical result of the search for the South Pole. Whether the deposits are large or small and the quality of the coal are matters yet to be ascertained by geologists and experts.

There may be error or exaggeration in estimating the value and extent of our Alaska coal fields, but there is no reason to question the fact that the deposits in the American territory are wonderfully rich. Though in the frozen North they are accessible as the future source of coal supply to meet all the requirements of industries in the United States for centuries to come.

Chinese coal may find its way into the markets of the world before many years. It may be that the coal fields of Alaska and China and possibly those of Persia will be nearly exhausted before means are found to make available the coal in the Antarctic regions. The ice barrier and the intense cold of the temperature will prevent any immediate utilization of the deposits there.

Yet it is well to know that such an ultimate resource for fuel exists. Australia and New Zealand will doubtless lead in finding means to overcome the difficulties in the future, but generations at least are likely to pass before the effort is consummated. There should be no more talk about the exhaustion of the world's coal for centuries to come, but nevertheless wise conservation in the existing mining fields is to be studiously observed.

Carborundum first was produced by a chemist, who, while experimenting with electricity, happened to place carbon electrodes connected with a dynamo into a bowl containing some crushed coke and clay.